

Message Text

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SUBJ: THIS WEEK IN COLOMBIA

1. BEGIN SUMMARY. THE PAST WEEK HAS BEEN A TRYING TIME FOR THE COLOMBIAN PUBLIC IN GENERAL AND FOR PRESIDENT LOPEZ IN PARTICULAR. THE

ABRUPT RESIGNATION OF GENERAL PUYANA EARLY IN THE WEEK BROUGHT TO PUBLIC

ATTENTION THE LONG STANDING DISAGREEMENTS BETWEEN CERTAIN FACTIONS OF THE ARMED FORCES AND BETWEEN PRESIDENT LOPEZ AND SOME OF HIS KEY MILITARY OFFICERS. PUBLIC DISORDERS WERE NUMEROUS AND VARIED, ACCOMPANIED BY FREQUENT CRITICISMS OF GOC INSTITUTIONS AND OF LOPEZ' LEADERSHIP. FORMER PRESIDENT CARLOS LLERAS CONTINUED HIS PUBLIC APPEARANCES; THE "NON-CANDIDATE" MADE TWO MAJOR SPEECHES AND INDICATED

THAT MORE WERE TO COME. AT WEEKS' END, POLITICIANS AND OTHER MEMBERS OF THE LEADERSHIP COMMUNITY WERE SPECULATING ON POSSIBILITIES THAT RANGED FROM CABINET SHAKE-UPS TO A MOVE BY THE MILITARY. THE PRESIDENT APPEARED TO BE TRYING TO RIDE OUT THE WEEK'S EVENTS AND, BY DOING SO, TO PRESERVE THE APPEARANCE-AND BY EXTENSION- THE FACT OF STABILITY IN HIS NINE MONTH OLD ADMINISTRATION.
END SUMMARY.

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2. THE LONG-STANDING RIVALRY BETWEEN DEFENSE MINISTER, GENERAL

VARON AND ARMY COMMANDER, GENERAL VALENCIA AS WELL AS THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PRESIDENT LOPEZ AND GENERAL VALENCIA AS WELL AS THE DIFFERENCES

BETWEEN PRESIDENT LOPEZ AND GENERAL VALENCIA BROKE INTO PUBLIC VIEW LAST WEEK WITH THE ABRUPT RETIREMENT OF GENERAL GABRIEL PUYANA GARCIA (BOGOTA 4494). PUYANA, A SUPPORTER OF ARMY COMMANDER VALENCIA, WAS KNOWN TO BE CRITICAL OF THE ADMINISTRATIONS' POLICY IN A NUMBER OF FIELDS REPORTEDLY INCLUDING THRDRELUCTANCE OF THE PRES-

IDENT (AND HIS DEFENSE MINISTER) TO USE THE "STATE OF SIEGE" PROVISIONS

OF THE CONSTITUTION TO DEAL WITH PUBLIC DISORDERS. ALTHOUGH THERE WERE ANGRY REACTIONS AMONG THE VALENCIA/PUYANA FOLLOWERS, THE GENERALS, OF BOTH FACTIONS, MOVED QUICKLY TO CALM DOWN THE LESS SENIOR OFFICERZM GENERAL VALENCIA, A FORCEFUL FIGURE WITH A "GOOD PRESS" CANNOT BUT BE PERCEIVED AS A PRBLEM TO PRESIDENT LOPEZ. THE LATTER, AT THIS WRITING, IS TRYING TO RIDE OUT THE EVENTS SURROUNDING THE REMOVAL OF GENERAL PUYANA. TO THE EXTENT THAT HE CAN DO SO WITHOUT RESORTING TO CHANGES IN THE CABINET OR IN THE ARMED FORCES LEADERSHIP, HE WILL HAVE PRESERVED THE HIGHLY IMPORTANT APPEARANCE (AND THE FACT) OF STABILITY AND ORDER IN HIS ADMINISTRATION.

3. PUBLIC DISORDER. ADDING TO THE PESSIMISTIC MOOD OF PRESIDENT LOPEZ AND THE COUNTRY AT LARGE DURING THE WEEK WERE A SHARPLY INCREASED NUMBER OF UNION AND CIVIC DEMONSTRATIONS THROUGHOUT COLOMBIA. A TWO-WEEK OLD CEMENT WORKERS STRIKE, AFFECTING MANY OF THE MAJOR CEMETN PLANTS IN THE COUNTRY CONTINUED UNABATED, WITH SIGNS APPEARING ONLY AT THE END OF THIS WEEK THE MINISTRY OF LABOR'S MEDIATION EFFORTS MIGHT SHORTLY LEAD TO A SETTLEMENT. A PROLONGED IMPASSE COULD LEAD TO A SUBSTANTIAL REDUCTION IN CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITY, WITH THE CONSEQUENT POSSIBILITY OF DISTURBANCES BY IDLED CONSTRUCTION WORKERS. MANY TEACHERS ORGANIZATIONS THOUGHOUT COLOMBIA TOOK ADVANTAGE OF NATIONAL TEACHERS DAY MAY 15 TO PROTEST THE DELAY IN NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE NATIONAL TEACHERS FEDERATION (FECODE) AND THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, WHICH THEY BLAMED ON THE MINISTRY, TO RAISE TEACHERS SALARIES AND SETTLE OTHER PROBLEMS. IN MEDELLIN, A SMALL GROUP OF TEACHERS THREW ROCKS AT THE POLICE AND DISRUPTED TRAFFIC. MEANWHILE, IN OTHER CITIES (BARRANQUILLA, MANIZALES) AND VILLAGES AND SMALL TOWNS (MARINILLA IN CONFIDENTIAL

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ANTIOQUIA, SEVILLA IN VALLE) CITIZENS PROTESTED SUCH MATTERS AS WATER SHORTAGES AND INADEQUATE GOVERNMENT SERVICES. IN ADDITION, A STRIKE BY RESIDENT DOCTORS IN SOME OF THE HOSPITALS ASSOCIATED WITH THE NATIONAL SOCIAL SECURITY SYSTEM WAS PARTIALLY EFFECTIVE. SPIRITS WERE FURTHERED DAMPENED BY CHARGES OF CORRUPTION IN VARIOUS GOVERNMENT

ENTITIES, INCLUDING THE GOVERNMENT AGRICULTURAL MARKETING AGENCY (IDEMA), CIVIL AERONAUTICS, THE BOGOTA TRANSPORTATION

AUTHORITY (DATT) AND THE EVERPRESENT COMPTROLLER GENERALS OFFICE. WHILE NONE OF THE ABOVE IS OUT OF THE ORDINARY IN COLOMBIA, THE CONJUNCTION OF THESE INCIDENTS IN ONE WEEK COUPLED WITH OTHER EVENTS (SEE ABOVE) CREATED AN UNEASY MOOD AMONG THE COLOMBIAN PUBLIC.

4. FORMER PRESIDENT LLERAS CONTINUES EFFORTS TO INFLUENCE LIBERAL PARTY. CONTINUING TO SPEAK OUT AS A "SIMPLE PUBLIC CITIZEN" FORMER PRESIDENT CARLOS LLERAS RESTREPO TOOK HIS "NON-CANDIDACY" CAMPAIGN TO REFORM THE LIBERAL PARTY TO BUCARAMANGA AND CALI DURING THE WEEK. PARTICIPATING IN A CELEBRATION HONORING THE LIBERAL NEWSPAPER EL LIBERAL AND APPEARING IN OTHER PUBLIC ACTS, LLERAS URGED THE COLOMBIAN PUBLIC TO SUPPORT PRESIDENT LOPEZ, CALLED FOR PRIMARY ELECTIONS TO SELECT THE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES, AND SAID THAT IF THE LIBERAL PUBLIC REALLY WANTED HIM, HE WOULD RUN FOR PRESIDENT IN 1978. LLERAS' "NON-CAMPAIGN" SPEECHES WERE APPARENTLY VERY ANIMATED, PROMPTING PRESIDENT LOPEZ, IN HIS LETTER TO THE DIRECTORS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF TADEO LOZANO (BOGOTA 4386), TO ACCUSE LLERAS (IN A STRAINED EFFORT AT HUMOR) OF SOUNDING LIKE HITLER URGING HIS FOLLOWERS TO CONQUER THE WORLD. SPEAKING IN CALI ON CHILD NUTRITION BEFORE THE COLOMBIAN INSTITUTE OF ADMINISTRATION, LLERAS SPOKE IN A CALMER MANNER AND HOPED ALOUD THAT THIS TONE WAS MORE SPEASING TO LOPEZ.

5. PRESIDENT CITES INTERNAL "DISINTEGRATION". IN HIS OPEN LETTER TO THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE TADEO LOZANO UNIVERSITY (SEE BELOW) PRESIDENT LOPEZ NOT ONLY DEALT WITH QUESTIONS RELATED TO THE UNIVERSITY

CRISIS BUT EXPANDED HIS REMARKS TO NOTE A DISINTERGRATION WITHIN THE COUNTRY. HE LAMENTED THE LOW LEVEL OF MORALITY, POINTING TO RECENT SCANDALS AND CRIME AS EXAMPLES, AND CRITICIZED MEMBERS OF HIS OWN GOVERNMENT AND OTHER PUBLIC PERSONALITIES FOR

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INCAUTIOUS PUBLIC REMARKS. THE PRESIDENT WAS REFERRING TO SUCH EVENTS AS THE MINISTER OF LABOR'S WARNING TO INDUSTRIALISTS OF POSSIBLE CONFRONTATION; THE PROPOSAL BY THE SUPERINTENDENT OF COOPERATIVES THAT COMMERCIAL ADVERTISING BE RESTRICTED AND CONTROLEED; THE STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTER OF JUSTICE CRITICIZING THE COURT SYSTEM FOR INCOMPETENCE AND CURRUPTION; AND THE UNNECESSARY HARD LINE TAKEN BY THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION IN HIS EXCHANGE WITH THE BOARD OF THE TADEO LOZANO UNIVERSITY. LOPEZ CALLED FOR CREATIVE OPPOSITION RATHER THAN DEBILITATING INTERNAL DISINTEGRATION.

6. TADEO LOZANO UNIVERSITY CRISIS ENDS. PRESIDENT LOPEZ PERSONALLY INTERVENED TO SOOTH TEMPER AND HELD END THEO MONTH CRISIS AT THE PRIVATE JORGE TADEO LOZANO UNIVERSITY IN BOGOTA. (BOGOTA 4338). RESPONDING TO A REQUEST FOR HIS INTERVENTION TO SOLVE

THE IMPASSE, LOPEZ ISSUED A LETTER ON MAY 12 IN WHICH HE REMINED
THE BOARD OF THE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSIBILITY TO OVERSEE ALL EDUCATION,

CALLED FOR THE REOPENING OF THE UNIVERSITY, AND ENCOURAGED THE
REESTABLISHMENT OF THE AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE BOARD AND STUDENTS AGREED

TO IN APRIL . LOPEZ OFFERED NO NEW SOLUTIONS BUT HIS EXPRESSIONS OF
PERSONAL INTEREST APPEARED SUFFICIENT TO EASE TENSIONS (BOGOTA 4386).
ON MAY 13 THE BOARD EXPRESSED ITS SATISFICATION WITH THE PRESIDENT'S
INTERVENTION AND ANNOUNCED THE REOPENING OF THE UNIVERSTIY.
THOUGH THIS PARTICULAR CRISIS HAS BEEN RESOLVED, AN UNEASINESS
AMONG MANY PRIVATE EDUCATORS, PROMPTED BY THE GOVERNMENT'S
"NEW CONCEPT" OF EDUCATION, REMAINS. (REFTEL&7* ON MAY 15 RECTORS
ON 17 PRIVATE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS FORMALLY AND PUBLICLY
QUESTIONED THE GOVERNMENTS' EARLIER DECISION TO PLACE REPRESENTA-
TIVES ON BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF ALL PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES. THIS MOVE
AND REMARKS BY EMBASSY CONTACTS INDICATE THAT PRIVATE EDUCATORS
ARE CONCERNED OVER HOW FAR THE GOVERNMENT WILL GO.

7. ON THURESDAY THE INFLUENTIAL NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
INDUSTRIALISTS(ANDI) DESCRIBED AS UNACCEPTABLE SOME OF THE
RECENT PUBLIC STATMENTS OF LABOR MINISTER MARIA ELENA DE
CROVO. THE MINISTER, WHO HAS REPORTEDLY BEEN BRINKING HEAVILY
IN RECENT DAYS, HAS MADE A NUMBER OF INFLAMMATORY PUBLIC
STATEMENTS. SHE ACCUSED ANDI OF TREATING THE CONGREE AS
QTE IRRESPONSIBLE AND IGNORANT UNQTE IN DEALING WITH LABOR
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MATTERS. THESE AND OTHER RECENT STATEMENTS BY MRS DE CROVO
HAVE RASIED EYEBROWS AMONG THE COLOMBIAN ESTABLISHMENT AND
APPEAR TO PRESAGE YET ANOTHER PROBLEM FOR THE LOPEZ
ADMINISTRATIONS.
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